

Sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent

‘Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants.’

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The Pharisees, in a moment of seeming compassion and magnanimity, appear to want to help our Lord. *‘Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.’* They court the good will of the masses, the people who have gathered around Jesus, who hang on the Lord’s every word. Rather than cross the masses and oppose them, the Pharisees seek to appear as if they side with them in their respect for Jesus. So they supposedly warn the Christ *‘Flee, for Herod wants to kill you.’*

But the Lord knows their malice, He knows their anger, for immediately previous to this episode, our Lord had insulted the dignity of the Pharisees, for in a parable, Christ taught that even the heathen and gentiles would enter the kingdom of heaven before the righteous Pharisees and priests.

So they do not want Him to enter Jerusalem, there to spread His doctrine against theirs in the Holy City itself. But Jesus intends to do exactly this, to go to Jerusalem, there to preach His word, there to fulfill His word, there to become the true prophet who is killed for His word, and so become not only the Word made flesh, but the Word made murdered flesh.

Our Lord rightly rebukes the Pharisees: *‘Go and tell this fox “Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. Nevertheless, I must go on my way [...] for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.”’*

‘Go and tell this fox.’ Jesus speaks strangely here, even ungrammatically. He says *‘this’*, as if the person He is addressing is right at hand, that is, the Pharisees. Yet he says *‘fox’* in the singular, as if He is speaking of one single person, of far off

Herod. The reason is simple, for the Pharisees and Herod are of one mind. The Pharisees would have Jesus killed at any point in His public ministry. Herod would have had Jesus killed as an infant in Bethlehem. The one would have him die in His manhood; the other in His childhood. Yet both, Herodian and Pharisee, want to see this Jesus dead. Therefore they together are as one fox, one scavenging beast, desiring only to maintain the eminence they have gained for themselves in their worldly kingdoms, having no care at all for the '*kingdom that is not of this world.*'

Jesus, therefore, against the protests of righteous Pharisee and maddened Herodian goes forth to establish a new kingdom *in his blood*.

It is not without wisdom that God, before all time, ordained that on the Mount of Zion, would all sacrifice to Him be offered. For it was there, upon Zion, that Abraham raised a blade up against *his son, his only son, the son whom he loved*. It was there that the heavenly angel stayed Abraham's hand and spared Isaac, putting in his place a ram caught in a thorn bush. It was there that the Father of all the Israelites would promise '*on this place, the Lord shall provide a sacrifice.*' It was upon Zion, in the city of Jerusalem, that the holy Temple of the Most High was build. It was there that the manifold sacrifices instituted by holy Moses were to be offered, the '*blood of bulls and of goats*', '*the burning of incense, in the evening and the morning.*'

It was in Jerusalem that the holy Prophets offered the sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving, where, as incense, the Word was offered up to the people before the Almighty; and with this Word, blood commingled, the blood of the prophets themselves, for indeed '*It cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.*'

All true sacrifice is offered in Jerusalem, upon Mount Zion, that God's people and all humanity might know where to look when the true and final sacrifice is offered; they might know where they might seek the revelation of God, and of His Passion.

Jesus, therefore, against the protests of righteous Pharisee and maddened Herodian goes forth to establish a new kingdom *in his blood*. And that kingdom shall be established in Jerusalem, that all the world may see the king and the pouring out of His suffering on behalf of unbelieving mankind.

We need not wait until Palm Sunday and Good Friday to recount in passing the rest of this divine comedy that is to come. Our Lord shall come to Jerusalem, and indeed the people shall shout *'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'* There shall He teach and heal. There shall He dine. There shall He be betrayed. There shall He be brought before Herod to be mocked, then before Pilate to be tormented. There the High Priests and Pharisees shall call out to their Roman overlord, as the pagan governor pleaded for Christ's life, crying out *'Let his blood be upon us and our children.'*

Foolish tongues sometimes speak wise words. The prophet Jeremiah spoke, saying *'If you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves.'* Now the Jews demand *'Let this innocent blood be upon us.'* They thought they begged for their own damnation. Unknowingly, they prayed for their own salvation. For the Word has come to shed innocent blood, blood *'which speaks a better word than that of Abel.'* For the blood of the innocent men cries forth from the ground of the killing field for justice. The blood of the innocent Son of Man shall cry forth from the wetted scarlet dust of Golgotha for mercy.

[All great nations, great kingdoms, are founded in blood.

Rome was founded in the slaughter of Remus. The Empire was founded in the murder of Caesar. Athens was founded upon the slaying of mythical monsters, and

Carthage with the killing of Acerbas, the husband of Dido. Even this American Republic was founded in the blood of patriots.]

[Now Jesus,] In His blood, a new kingdom has been founded, here in its infancy, in the age to come, in its burning glory. For the story does not end with His crucifixion. 'He was crucified, died, and was buried, and the third day He rose again, and ascended into heaven.' Indeed, He again has left us, for He has ascended, and we may be tempted to cry out in our hour of need *'Behold, our house is forsaken.'* But do

we not every Lord's Day greet the coming again of our God, singing with voice and organ and instrument *'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'*? He has ascended, that He may descend, that He may give us His blood, His blood of Golgotha, the blood that pleads for mercy.

'My brothers, whom I love and long for,

my joy and crown.’ A day is coming when what we see here now in shadow, we shall see in light; what we see now as poor we shall see as dear; what the world calls now petty shall be called dread; the kingdom that the Lord made humble shall be made glorious. ‘For He will come again with glory, and His kingdom will have no end.’ For behold, there shall be a New Jerusalem ‘coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. It will have a great boundless wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels. This city shall be pure gold, a gold which is clear as glass. And its foundation shall be of sapphire and emerald and onyx. And in this city there shall be no temple, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb. And the city will have no sun or moon, for the glory of God shall give it light.’ ‘On this city shall be innocent blood, upon it and upon its inhabitants.’

Fix your eyes upon this vision, dear Christians, for though the kingdom now be scattered across the earth, persecuted and derided, mocked, even as our Lord; oppressed, even as our Lord; murdered, even as our Lord; yet even as our Lord shall it come down from heaven, and break the nations, and crush every earthly power, when the Man comes around. Cast all worldly concerns and anxieties from your mind. Behold only the city and the gates. The sapphire and the gold, and the light of God, *which enlightens all things*. Do not be seduced by the devil and the desires of this world. Revile them, for *‘with minds set on earthly things, their end is destruction.’* Rather:

‘Stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.’

‘For our citizenship is in heaven.’

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon texts: Jeremiah 26:8-15, Philippians 3:17-4:1, Luke 13:31-35